

EXHIBIT 6

TIMES RECORD

Police: Heroin becoming more prevalent in Fort Smith region

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Heroin, a highly addictive opiate made from poppy plants and processed from morphine, is making inroads into the greater Fort Smith area, according to authorities.

After falling out of favor in the 1990s, the drug is making a comeback and is appearing more often on the streets.

“One of the reasons heroin is making a come back is because people are so addicted to pharmaceuticals — opiates and opioids, and heroin is cheaper. It’s one of the cheapest drugs that can be purchased,” LeFlore County Sheriff Ron Seale explained.

At the same time the Drug Enforcement Agency is cracking down on the diversion of prescription pills from the person for whom they were prescribed to someone else, John Hicks with the Sebastian County Sheriff’s Office said.

“When the DEA cracks down on this, the supply goes down for pills such as Oxycodone or Roxycodone, and the price for heroin is cheaper,” Hicks added.

Therefore, the demand for heroin will increase, authorities explained.

Hicks said, “At one point, it was easier for users to get pills, now it’s becoming easier for them to obtain heroin.”

Heroin is moving into Arkansas from eastern states such as Kentucky and Ohio. Seale says in Oklahoma, it’s coming from north Texas after getting there from Mexico.

"We know heroin is coming to our area from our fellow law enforcement officers from both coasts. ... Throughout America, there's been an increase on heroin seizures so we know it's coming," said the 12th Judicial District Drug Task Force Coordinator Paul Smith.

Capt. Shawn Firestine, criminal investigations supervisor at the Crawford County Sheriff's Office, said heroin is starting to appear in that county although it isn't always recognized.

"I think we don't see it in Crawford County a lot is because the officers haven't seen it a lot. What I mean by that is that the officers aren't trained to automatically spot it. For instance, if they see a baggie with white crystals in it, they automatically (assume) it's methamphetamine because we've dealt with it for years. We've all seen a lot of meth," Firestine explained. "But it is here and more and more is getting into our area."

"There's fentanyl-based heroin that's even more potent than black tar heroin. It's causing a lot of issues across the country," Firestine said.

Alarming, suppliers are adding fentanyl, a potent synthetic opioid blamed for thousands of American overdose deaths, to heroin so they can make more profit because heroin is relatively cheap but fentanyl-based heroin sells for more, according to police.

"That's another thing... there's guys trying to make money and they're selling illicit drugs that are based or laced with other drugs... and it's killing people," Firestine explained.

"People who buy heroin from a street dealer don't know where it's coming from, what it's cut with or if it's been laced or cut with fentanyl or anything else," Hicks said.

Preventing the storm

Authorities are trying to fight heroin with education, and they hope they have an early jump on what could be a growing problem.

Smith said, "Daily, we're working with street sources, who are out there letting us know when new people come into the area, if they're bringing heroin. ... We're in contact with our sources daily ... because if they or us see it, we can curtail the issue before it impacts our community."

Pevehouse agreed, "Education, I think, is the first key of our battle against, perhaps, this coming epidemic."

Local law enforcement has other advantages over the drug.

"Being a smaller community we are able to take care of the issue quicker," Firestine said.

Smith said, "Also, authorities in Crawford and Sebastian Counties, and all of the other counties in our area, have better relations with citizens in the community ... and when we speak with community members, they also give us information when they see something illegal."

A challenge is the popularity of misusing prescription drugs in the area.

"What we're seeing in our youth particularly in Arkansas is they don't see prescription pills being something that's bad, and therefore they're more prone to take prescription drugs because they don't see it as being a danger. However, they do understand when talked to about heroin, meth and other Schedule I and II drugs, as being bad ... ," Smith explained. "Sadly, we've seen pill use and abuse spiral into heroin use."

Collateral damage

"A lot of these people on heroin aren't holding jobs, they don't have insurance, they're not paying taxes ...," Firestine said. "So public resources are going to be really strained ... and that's one of the reasons we work so hard to keep it out. We have a nice community ... and the money spent on new roads, building new parks or jails, city complexes, and so on, will be diverted by the states to go toward medical care and so forth for addicts."

Authorities encourage families and friends of users to get them help immediately whether it be speaking with police or sending them to rehabilitation centers.

Smith added, "It's a necessary fight. If someone wants to help someone on drugs they've got to step up, not be an enabler and be proactive. Don't ignore the issue because ignoring the issue is the same thing as enabling."

It's recommended that addicts who want to get clean get professional help. They can't go "cold turkey" off heroin.

"That expression was derived from the withdraws from heroin because something that happens when the user withdraws is they'll get chills and they'll get goosebumps, which looks like the skin on a frozen turkey," Seale explained. "They have to use other drugs to help them come down off heroin because the withdraws can kill them."

Medical protocol

Paramedics can reverse the effects of heroin by administering Narcan, an opiate antagonist. Known generically as naloxone, Narcan, when administered to someone who has overdosed on opioids, takes over the opiate receptors in the brain, essentially pushing the opiate out of the brain. It helps to restore normal breathing, even when the patient has used alcohol as well as drugs.

Paramedics at Fort Smith EMS they haven't seen many heroin overdoses as of yet, but they are sure they've responded to some heroin overdose calls.

"We get called for unconscious people but at the time; it's not a known heroin overdose. A lot of overdoses, especially illegal drugs ... we have an unconscious protocol we implement. We will give them Narcan and if it works, we can't assume it was a heroin overdose, but we do know it was some sort of opiate/opioid overdose if the Narcan is effective," Fort Smith EMS Operations Manager Shawn Rogers explained.

Paramedics take special precautionary measures when dealing with drug abusers.

"One of the issues I worry about when it comes to our medics is a lot of time ... the people who use heroin have criminal tendencies. It's a very addictive drug and the users will do whatever they have to, to get it in their possession," said Tim Hearn, director of Fort Smith EMS.

Hearn explained, "If we administer Narcan and it wakes the person up whom we administer it to, it reverses their high and a lot of times they will become violent. It's not like someone who was prescribed an opiate from a physician and they've taken too many. When we wake them up so-to-speak, they're calm, but for a heroin or drug user, we've ruined their high and there can be violence associated with that."

"Our medics have Kevlar, bodyarmor and pepper spray to protect themselves from the potential violence while assisting a patient," Hearn said.

"My understanding of heroin is that the user will feel a very euphoric rush, and they'll enjoy it and then they're addicted because they want to take the drug over and over again, to where eventually, the tolerated dose is so much, that they'll quit breathing. When they quit breathing, hypoxia kills," Hearn said.

"Heroin ruins lives. It absolutely ruins lives," Rogers said.